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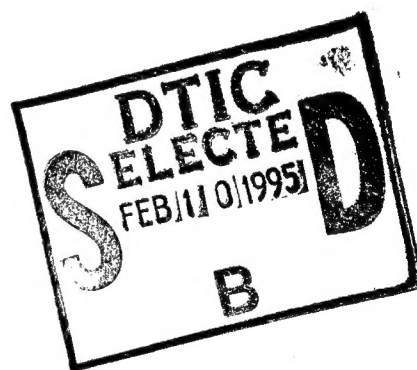
Before the Subcommittee on Human Resources,
Committee on Post Office and Civil Service,
House of Representatives

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MILITARY AIRCRAFT

Travel on 89th Military Airlift
Wing and Travel by Selected
Officials

Statement of Frank C. Conahan, Assistant Comptroller General
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here today to discuss our recent reports¹ on the policies on government officials' use of the 89th Wing aircraft and travel by selected executive branch officials on military aircraft. As you are aware, the first report was prepared at the request of the Ranking Minority Member of the House Government Operations Committee; the second report responded to requests from several Committees and Members of the Congress.

RESULTS IN BRIEF

The 89th Wing's aircraft are available for use by many high ranking executive and legislative branch officials and their parties. Our work on the policies that address the use of military aircraft by executive or legislative branch officials showed that the policies are so broad, vague, and subject to varying interpretations as to have little impact on the use of the 89th Wing aircraft. In addition, no one independently verifies compliance with the policies. As a result, the policies do not effectively guide, restrict, or limit the use of the 89th Wing aircraft, which is free of charge to all but a few users.

We believe the policies and their implementation are inadequate and do not provide assurance that the Wing is being used appropriately and consistently. The policies should clearly state that the 89th Wing should be used only on an exception basis and that a documented justification be available to demonstrate that each use is appropriate.

Our work on travel by eleven executive branch officials showed that they took 222 trips on military aircraft from January 21, 1989, through March 31, 1991. For that travel, 10 of the 11 officials generally followed travel policies requiring travel authorizations, justifications for using military aircraft, and reimbursements for political and personal travel. These policies were not followed, in many cases, by the 11th official, the former Chief of Staff of the White House (John H. Sununu).

For the solely political and personal trips on military aircraft where the official was the primary traveler, the estimated cost was \$774,330. Reimbursements for this travel, which were made or billed in accordance with the White House policy, totaled \$61,585.

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¹Military Aircraft: Policies on Government Officials' Use of 89th Military Airlift Wing Aircraft (GAO/NSIAD-92-133; April 9, 1992), and Military Aircraft: Travel by Selected Executive Branch Officials (GAO/AFMD-92-51, April 7, 1992).

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POLICIES ON GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS' USE OF
89TH MILITARY AIRLIFT WING AIRCRAFT

We examined the policies that govern the use of 89th Wing aircraft by executive and legislative branch officials and determined whether (1) the policies were consistent and uniform for both branches, (2) they were adequate to prevent abuse, (3) proper reimbursement policies existed where appropriate, and (4) sufficient enforcement safeguards existed to ensure policy compliance. We did not review (1) the need for any of the trips, (2) per diem or other travel expenses, or (3) any travel on other military or government aircraft.

Background

The Air Force's 89th Military Airlift Wing provides worldwide airlift for the President, the Vice President, and other high ranking dignitaries of the United States and foreign governments. When not used for higher priority purposes, 20 of the 89th Wing's 22 aircraft are available for use by many executive and legislative branch officials and their parties. The Wing's other two aircraft are for the President's exclusive use. In addition, the military departments have about 390 operational support aircraft that are generally available for use by government officials. The use of the 89th Wing and other military aircraft by government officials is addressed in a variety of official policy documents, including Office of Management and Budget Circular A-126. The policies generally describe circumstances under which use of the aircraft may be authorized but do not dictate or prescribe their use.

The 89th Wing has averaged about 900 trips each of the last several years. We estimate that the cost of operations, excluding depreciation, for the 89th Wing for fiscal year 1991 was at least \$150 million. As shown in table 1, the President, White House officials, and others traveling for the White House are the most frequent users of the 89th Wing aircraft, with Department of Defense officials a close second, and congressional travelers third.

Table 1: Total Number and General Destination of Trips on 89th Wing Aircraft by Agency from January 1, 1989, through March 31, 1991

| Agency | -----Number of trips----- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|-------|----------|
| | Total | U.S. | Non-U.S. |
| White House | 868 | 657 | 211 |
| Department of Defense | 790 | 548 | 242 |
| OSD | 228 | 172 | 56 |
| Air Force | 210 | 164 | 46 |
| Army | 206 | 108 | 98 |
| Joint Chiefs of Staff | 129 | 96 | 33 |
| Navy | 17 | 8 | 9 |
| Congress | 337 | 143 | 194 |
| Department of State | 38 | 33 | 5 |
| Other agencies | 14 | 4 | 10 |
| Total | 2,047 | 1,385 | 662 |
| | ===== | ===== | === |

Policies Do Not Define Or Specify Who May Travel

Although the policies state that the 89th Wing aircraft are to be used only for official business, they do not define "official business" or, more importantly, the circumstances in which use of these aircraft would or would not be appropriate. Accordingly, almost any travel by high-level executive branch officials or Members of Congress can be rationalized by travelers as "official" and qualify for use of 89th Wing aircraft.

The President and Vice President, for security reasons, always travel by government aircraft when they fly. Several executive branch officials in addition to the President and Vice President have special authorization to use government aircraft whenever they travel by air. These are the Secretaries of State and Defense, the Attorney General, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Chief of Staff for the President, and the National Security Advisor to the President. The President and these other officials took about 26 percent of the trips on 89th Wing aircraft during our review period. (The Secretary of State recently announced that he would no longer use military aircraft for personal, domestic trips, except in unusual circumstances.)

Policies Do Not Guide Or Restrict Officials' Travel

A general policy established by Circular A-126 is that the use of government aircraft should be restricted to situations where it is cost-effective or where commercial aircraft services cannot meet the travel requirement. However, these restrictions do not have a major impact on officials' travel on 89th Wing aircraft. For example, the cost of using the 89th Wing aircraft is rarely

considered because (1) travelers can readily assert that commercial aircraft services were not available to adequately meet their needs and, therefore, do not need to prepare a cost comparison, and (2) most user agencies, including the White House, Congress, and Department of Defense, do not reimburse the Air Force for using the aircraft. When regular commercial airline services are available, more emphasis seems to be placed on accommodating travelers' schedules than on the policy of reliance on this service.

Policies Are Not Actively Enforced

The Air Force limits its role to scheduling and operating the 89th Wing aircraft. While Circular A-126 states that each use of the aircraft is to be justified and documented, the Air Force does not, nor does anyone else, independently verify that users of the 89th Wing aircraft have complied with the policies. The Air Force assumes that travelers have complied with the policies even though justifications for using the 89th Wing aircraft are not typically documented.

Policies Unclear On Spouses Traveling With Officials

The Secretary of Defense may, under certain conditions, approve the travel of officials' spouses and/or dependents. For at least some trips taken during our review period, spouses of executive and legislative branch officials were approved to travel without reimbursement. While some reimbursements were made, no one independently verified that nonofficial passengers on 89th Wing aircraft that should have reimbursed have done so and at the appropriate rates.

We continue to believe that a government-wide policy is needed to clarify the circumstances when nonofficial passengers may travel on government aircraft and when reimbursements may be required.

Recommendations

In our report, we concluded that the current policies need to be clarified to provide better assurance that the 89th Wing's assets are being used appropriately and consistently. The revised policies should (1) clearly state that the 89th Wing should be used only on an exception basis, (2) clearly define those exceptions, and (3) require that a documented justification be available to demonstrate that each use was appropriate. The critical decisions about the use of the 89th Wing aircraft are made by the approvers of the travel requests, such as chairmen of congressional committees and high-level officials of the executive agencies, and not by Air Force or 89th Wing officials. To ensure compliance with the revised policies, we believe that the documentation on each use of the aircraft should be independently reviewed.

Therefore, we recommended that Circular A-126 and the other policies that address executive branch use of the 89th Wing aircraft be clarified to provide better assurance that the aircraft are being used appropriately and consistently, as discussed below. We also recommended that the Congress adopt similar policies for the legislative branch officials' use of 89th Wing aircraft.

The revised executive branch policy and the new congressional policy should:

- (1) clearly describe how, when, by whom, and for what purposes the 89th Wing aircraft should be used;
- (2) provide specific guidance on how travelers should determine whether commercial aircraft services are available;
- (3) provide explicit guidance as to when and how travelers are to make cost comparisons;
- (4) clearly identify the circumstances under which both official and nonofficial travelers should reimburse the government for their travel and the appropriate amount to be reimbursed; and
- (5) clearly specify the extent to which compliance with each of these policies should be documented and controlled.

Since the issuance of our report on April 9, we have had preliminary discussions with officials from the Office of Management and Budget and the House of Representatives on how best to implement our recommendations.

TRAVEL BY SELECTED EXECUTIVE BRANCH OFFICIALS

The objectives of our review of travel by selected executive branch officials were to: (1) determine the extent of travel on military aircraft by 11 officials from January 21, 1989, through March 31, 1991, (2) identify the policies governing travel on military aircraft, (3) determine the extent to which the selected officials complied with certain policies, particularly with respect to required reimbursements to the U.S. government for political and personal travel, and (4) identify the military aircraft costs related to the political and personal trips.

We reviewed travel on military aircraft of the following 11 executive branch officials: Secretary of State James A. Baker III; former National Drug Control Policy Director William J. Bennett; Treasury Secretary Nicholas F. Brady; former Labor Secretary Elizabeth Dole; United States Trade Representative Carla A. Hills; Housing and Urban Development Secretary Jack Kemp; Interior Secretary Manuel Lujan, Jr.; former Transportation Secretary Samuel K. Skinner; former White House Chief of Staff

John H. Sununu; former Attorney General Dick Thornburgh; and Energy Secretary James D. Watkins.

Most of the travel by officials we reviewed was on aircraft assigned to the 89th Military Airlift Wing, located at Andrews Air Force Base outside of Washington, D.C.

Extent Of Travel

We reviewed 222 trips that 11 executive branch officials took on military aircraft from January 21, 1989, through March 31, 1991. Agency officials classified 151 of these trips as solely official, 28 as mixed official and political or personal, and 43 as solely political or personal. We have included a table showing the number of official, political, personal and mixed trips taken by each of the 11 individuals we reviewed as attachment I to this statement.

Because of security concerns and the need for secure communications, 3 of the 11 officials in our review had special authority which allowed them to regularly use government aircraft for political and personal, as well as official, travel. White House officials informed us that for the period we reviewed, the Chief of Staff regularly traveled on military aircraft. That practice was based on a White House memorandum approved by the President in August 1987 which stated that the Chief of Staff should always travel on Air Force planes so that he could be reached at all times and so that he would be safe from hijacking. According to White House officials, it has been a longstanding practice that both the Secretary of State and the Attorney General regularly use government aircraft for all official and unofficial travel because of their responsibilities, their need to be able to return to Washington or proceed to other destinations on an expedited basis in an emergency, and their need for heightened security because of the nature of their official duties. Effective April 3, 1992, the State Department changed its policy to allow the Secretary to use commercial aircraft for personal domestic travel.

Government Travel Policies

GSA's Federal Travel Regulation establishes the government's travel policy and the agencies' responsibilities for authorizing travel. Agencies are required to authorize and pay for only (1) that travel which is necessary to accomplish the purposes of the government effectively and economically and (2) those expenses essential to transacting official business. Also, all government travel is ordinarily required to be either authorized or approved by the agency head or by an official to whom such authority has been delegated before expenses are incurred.

OMB's Circular A-126, "Improving the Management and Use of Government Aircraft," prescribes specific policies executive agencies are to follow in acquiring, managing, using, and

accounting for the costs of government aircraft configured to carry passengers. The Circular establishes criteria for justifying the use of government aircraft and the procedures agencies must follow to document compliance with those criteria. Basically, government aircraft are to be used only when their use is more economical than commercial airline service or when commercial service is not available to effectively meet the agency's transportation needs.

In addition to GSA's overall travel regulation, the White House has issued supplemental travel guidance for its staff. This guidance, as contained in a policy memorandum and in the White House Staff Manual, requires travel authorizations for political travel. The other officials we reviewed were not subject to similar requirements for political travel.

White House policy also requires that political and personal travel on military aircraft be reimbursed at the equivalent cost of commercial coach airfare plus \$1. All 11 officials in our review were required to follow this policy.

On May 9, 1991, the White House released a modified travel policy statement governing the White House Chief of Staff's use of military aircraft. It requires that the White House Counsel's office review all of the Chief of Staff's requests for travel on military aircraft, and it limits the use of military aircraft for official and personal travel to those instances when security, communications, or scheduling needs require it. Further, effective December 19, 1991, revisions to the White House Staff Manual were approved. These revisions emphasize the need to document travel and strengthen controls over reimbursements for political and personal travel.

Compliance With Travel Policies

We reviewed compliance with travel policies requiring travel authorizations, justifications for using military aircraft, and reimbursements for political and personal travel. Ten of the 11 officials whose travel we reviewed generally followed these policies. These policies were not followed for travel by the 11th official, the former Chief of Staff, in many cases.

Travel Authorizations

Travel authorizations were required for 195 trips. We found that authorizations were prepared for 163 trips. The 32 trips with no authorizations relate primarily to travel by the former Chief of Staff (26 trips) and the former Drug Policy Director (4 trips). The other 2 trips with no authorizations involved day trips that two officials made with other individuals who had obtained the aircraft and for which other travel expenses were not incurred.

Justifications for Requesting Use of Military Aircraft

Cabinet-level officials who are not authorized to regularly use government aircraft for all their travel must justify the need for such aircraft when requesting them to perform agency business. We found that 10 trips taken by three officials required such justifications. For 9 of these trips, agency officials certified in written statements to the Department of Defense that commercial air service was not available to meet their transportation needs.

Reimbursements for Political and Personal Trips

Agency officials classified 71 of the 222 trips in our review as involving at least some political and/or personal activity. Data relating to reimbursements were available for 59 of the trips. We did not obtain data on the other 12 trips which were with other officials not included in our review. Total reimbursements collected for 57 of these trips were \$77,507. Agency officials told us that reimbursements were not required for the other two trips because they involved personal trips at the locations where official business was conducted and therefore involved no additional travel for the personal portions of the trip.

The Secretary of State was not initially billed for 3 trips that mixed official and personal business. However, as a result of our review, the State Department reevaluated those trips and collected reimbursement of \$2,232 from the Secretary.

The classification of 21 of the former White House Chief of Staff's trips was changed. The 21 reclassifications required either additional reimbursements to the government or refunds by the government. The reclassifications resulted in net reimbursements collected or billed by the government of \$5,178.

Military Aircraft Cost Of Political And Personal Travel

We estimated military aircraft operating costs using Air Force rates and flying hours for 35 trips that involved solely political or personal activities and for which the official was the primary traveler. The trips for which we estimated costs included 24 trips by the former Chief of Staff (16 political and 8 personal) and 11 personal trips by the Secretary of State. The estimated costs associated with these trips was \$774,330. Reimbursements for this travel, which were made or billed in accordance with the White House policy, totaled \$61,585.

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This concludes my prepared statement, Mr. Chairman. I will be
happy to answer any questions you may have.

SELECTED EXECUTIVE BRANCH OFFICIALS' TRAVEL ON MILITARY AIRCRAFT
FROM JANUARY 21, 1989, TO MARCH 31, 1991

| Traveler | Trips | | | | Total |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------------|-----------|
| | Official | Political | Personal | Mixed ^a | |
| <u>Had special authority to regularly use military aircraft</u> | | | | | |
| Attorney General (former) ^b | 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 12 |
| Chief of Staff (former) | 31 | 16 | 8 | 11 | 66 |
| Secretary of State | <u>46</u> | <u>0</u> | <u>11</u> | <u>7</u> | <u>64</u> |
| Subtotal | 89 | 16 | 19 | 18 | 142 |
| <u>Permitted to use military aircraft^c</u> | | | | | |
| Drug Policy Director (former) | 5 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 8 |
| Secretary of Energy | 9 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| Secretary of Housing and Urban Development | 5 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Secretary of the Interior | 11 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 14 |
| Secretary of Labor (former) | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| Secretary of Transportation (former) | 3 | 2 | 0 | 5 | 10 |
| Secretary of the Treasury | 13 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 16 |
| U.S. Trade Representative | <u>11</u> | <u>0</u> | <u>0</u> | <u>0</u> | <u>11</u> |
| Subtotal | 62 | 7 | 1 | 10 | 80 |
| Total | 151 | 23 | 20 | 28 | 222 |

^aMixed travel consists of official and political travel or official and personal travel.

^bThe former Attorney General was authorized to use either military or other government aircraft.

^cThese officials, who do not have authority to obtain military aircraft for personal or political trips, made political, personal, or mixed trips with others who had such authority.

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